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Francis Maude MP
House of Commons
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14 April 2009

Dear Francis,

Thank you for your letter of 13 April.

Both the Prime Minister and I take these issues extremely seriously. As you know, the Prime Minister issued a statement yesterday making clear that he has been assured that no Minister or political adviser other than Damian McBride had any knowledge of, or involvement in, the e-mails which were covered in the weekend newspapers. The Prime Minister's Spokesman has made clear that he was not aware of the proposed website or concept behind it. The Prime Minister has also made clear that Damian McBride's actions were unacceptable and that there is no place in Government or public life more generally for actions of this nature. Tom Watson has made his own position clear.

What happened constituted a clear and serious breach of the *Code of Conduct for Special Advisers*. It cannot and has not been tolerated. Mr McBride is no longer employed as a special adviser. His resignation was accepted immediately and had immediate effect. He has not received severance pay.

Both the *Ministerial Code* and the *Code of Conduct for Special Advisers* are clear that government resources should not be used for party political purposes. The Prime Minister has asked me to strengthen the procedures governing these Codes in the light of the events reported this weekend. I have therefore today written to Permanent Secretaries with strengthened guidance and to arrange for special advisers within their departments to sign an undertaking to confirm that they have read and understood the strengthened *Code of Conduct for Special Advisers*. The Prime Minister has also asked me to remind Ministers and special advisers of the requirements of their respective Codes of Conduct in this regard. In particular, under this strengthened guidance, it has been made specifically clear that special advisers will automatically be dismissed if they are ever found to be preparing and disseminating inappropriate material. This implements the commitment made by the Prime Minister.

Your final point raises broader concerns about ensuring the highest standards in public life. The Prime Minister and I are entirely committed to this. As the PM has made clear, the events reported over the past weekend were not acceptable, and fell far short of the



high standards the public has a right to expect. Strong and swift action has been taken as a result. Neither the Prime Minister nor I want or expect to see any repetition of such events. Were it to happen, appropriate action will be taken.

You notified me that you were releasing your letter to the press. I am similarly content for you to release this reply, and I have authorised the Cabinet Office press office to release the text if requested by the media.

Yours sincerely,
Gus

Gus O'Donnell

